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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USNATO 000073

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SUBJECT: ALLIES RECEPTIVE TO FRANK PRESENTATION BY PETRAEUS

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Classified By: Ambassador Kurt Volker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: General Petraeus, commander of U.S. Central Command, held a well-received consultation with NATO Permanent Representatives on February 12. Allies were surprised by and receptive to his frankness. Petraeus reassured Allies that the U.S. will complete its Afghanistan strategic review in time for the April 3-4 NATO Summit, and will seek input along the way. He said the U.S. acknowledges NATO's Comprehensive Approach as an "eminently sensible" way to organize the Afghanistan effort. His presentation showcased a broad U.S. whole of government approach well beyond counter-terrorism operations, focused on "securing, serving, and being good guests in the Afghans' country." Allies were seized with the idea of applying lessons learned from the Iraq counterinsurgency effort to Afghanistan. Other questions centered on how to respond to Afghan requests like the military technical agreement, pre-deployment preparation of international forces, and revising expectations of the Afghan government. End Summary.

Consultation, Review, and Comprehensive Approach

12. (C) Petraeus described his visit to NATO as a consultation aimed at listening to Allied recommendations and answering their questions. He conveyed that he brings a message of continuity, change, and commitment to the Alliance. Petraeus said the Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force is conducting the "review of reviews," to be completed in March in time for the NATO Summit (France asked Petraeus to convey to Washington the urgency of knowing the results well in advance). He reassured Allies that the U.S. sees NATO's Comprehensive Approach as a pragmatic and sensible way to organize the Afghanistan effort, but said operationalizing it among all international community contributors including NATO, the European Union and United Nations will be a great challenge.

13. (C) Petraeus identified urgent security requirements that would be necessary no matter what the U.S. strategic review process determined, and he asked for Allied commitment to:

-- Provide elections support and improve training of Afghan

police and army units;
-- Expand the Afghan National Army Trust Fund;
-- Agree to staffing Provincial Reconstruction Teams in the provinces that lack them;
-- Encourage (through bilateral engagements) Pakistan to recognize the extremist challenge in the Northwest Frontier Province, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and Baluchistan as its greatest existential threat; and
-- Continue bilateral talks with Kyrgyzstan about the importance of maintaining Manas Air Base, since replacing the base would be costly and inconvenient.

Afghanistan is not Iraq, but...

14. (C) Permanent Representatives (PermReps) credited Petraeus with "turning around the Iraq experience," and wanted to know which lessons learned could apply to Afghanistan. They asked about successful preparation of soldiers to work with local populations, how they were able to dramatically reduce violence in one year's time, and whether lessons of the Iraqi reconciliation efforts could be tailored for Afghanistan. Petraeus applauded Allies' sustained efforts in security force training in Iraq. He gave a detailed presentation of how the fused civilian-military "Anaconda" approach helped isolate al-Qaida in Iraq from its sources of power, and said many elements of this comprehensive model could be fine-tuned for Afghanistan.

While Petraeus was optimistic that political "awakenings" could occur at the tribal level in Afghanistan, he noted that the Iraqi local and national reconciliation programs relied on an effective bureaucracy (missing in Afghanistan). On better preparing soldiers for the field, Petraeus described

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the advantages of longer tour lengths of six months to a year (more optimal for getting an instinctive feel for the local population so critical in effective counterinsurgency operations). He said the best way to enable the shorter deployments was to stipulate thorough, geographically focused, and locally-tailored pre-deployment training.

Afghan people are the vital terrain

15. (C) Allies responded positively to the idea of "being good neighbors" and said civilian casualties shattered the image of international troops. Petraeus noted the importance of being first with the truth and supported the most recent Tactical Directive as outlining sound improvements in force conduct procedures. The Canadian Ambassador asked how NATO-ISAF could better address Afghan requests such as the military technical agreement proposal. Petraeus said responses should be coordinated from positions of strength, and described ongoing U.S. efforts to respond to Afghan government concerns about civilian casualties. Allies appreciated his candid explanation of a current short-term suspension of counter-terrorism operations during talks between COMISAF and the Afghan government on enhanced Afghan participation.

16. (C) Responding to a Turkish question about regional engagement, Petraeus said the key is to convince Afghanistan's neighbors to abandon a renewed "Great Game" in favor of broad partnership against extremism and the flow of illegal narcotics.

Expectations of the Afghans

17. (C) Petraeus said the solution to rapidly improving the Afghan police was by supplying adequate mentors. Responding to a Bulgarian question about whether the police training model is appropriate to the task, Petraeus talked about the success of the Afghan National Civil Order Police. He acknowledged the continuing vulnerability of the Afghan

National Police to local threats, assassinations, and intimidation of their families. Petraeus agreed with Hungarian and UK comments about expecting more of Afghan leadership. He pointed to the dearth of human capital and civilian capacity in the Afghan government, and he urged long term investment in capacity building and a corresponding "accountability offensive" to limit corruption and build legitimacy.

Comment

¶8. (C) Allies typically have no trouble understanding the level of ambition in Afghanistan, but often underestimate the full scope of what is required to achieve it. Petraeus made the full scope and breadth apparent. During his explanation of the Anaconda strategy in Iraq, the room was quiet enough to hear a pin drop. Allies welcomed the tone shift to one of consultation and information sharing. Short of applauding at the end, PermReps were enthusiastic about the briefing, and appreciated the candid conversation about lessons learned from the successful application of an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency model. End comment.

¶9. (U) This cable was cleared by General Petraeus.
ANDRUSYSZYN